

Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*
Texas-Style Fiddling, Classical Violin,
and American String Playing
by
Beth Youngblood

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Danwen Jiang, Chair
Katherine McLin
Kay Norton

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ABSTRACT

Classical violin playing and American fiddle music have traditionally been seen as separate musical worlds. Classical violinists practice and study long hours to master a standard repertoire of concertos and sonatas from the Western European school of art music. Fiddlers pride themselves on a rich tradition passed down through generations of informal jam sessions and innovation through improvisation. Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*, premiered in 1993, sounds like a contradiction at first: a quintessential classical form combined with traditional fiddle playing. Examination of the *Fiddle Concerto* will show that the piece contains classical and fiddle-style elements simultaneously, creating an effective hybrid of the two styles. This document will explore how the history of the classical violin concerto and American fiddle music converge in Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*. To gain an understanding of O'Connor's composition process, I submitted to him a list of questions, via email, in the summer of 2016. O'Connor's responses provide a unique insight into the genesis of the *Fiddle Concerto* and his vision for musical compositions that originate from multiple genres. Chapter four of this document will discuss the melodic themes, formal makeup, and techniques presented in the *Fiddle Concerto* and show how both classical and fiddle elements coexist in the piece. The result of the mix is an exciting work that appeals to a broad audience of music lovers. The final chapter of this document will explore the growing repertoire of music created by cross-pollinating from different styles to create a new style, including selected O'Connor compositions completed since the *Fiddle Concerto*, as well as similar works by other composers who combined classical elements with other musical styles.

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INTRODUCTION

Musicologists have traditionally viewed classical violin compositions and American fiddle music as separate musical genres. Classical violinists practice and study long hours to master a standard repertoire of concertos and sonatas from the European school of art music. Fiddlers pride themselves on a rich tradition passed down through oral traditions, jam sessions, and innovation through improvisation. Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*, premiered in 1993, sounds like a contradiction at first: a quintessential classical form combined with traditional fiddle playing. However, a closer examination of the *Fiddle Concerto* reveals that the piece contains classical and fiddle elements simultaneously, creating an effective hybrid of the two styles.

This document will explore how the history of the classical violin concerto and American fiddle music converge in Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*. To gain an understanding of O'Connor's compositional process, I submitted to him a list of questions, via email, in the summer of 2016. O'Connor was kind enough to respond, and the discussion provides a unique insight into the genesis of the O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* and his vision for musical compositions that originate from multiple genres. Chapter four of this document will discuss the melodic themes, formal makeup, and techniques presented in the *Fiddle Concerto*, showing how both classical and fiddle elements coexist in the piece. The result of the mix is an exciting work that appeals to a broad audience of music lovers. The final chapter of this document will explore the growing repertoire of music that cross-pollinates from different styles to create a new style, including selected O'Connor compositions completed since the *Fiddle Concerto*, as

well as similar works by other composers who combined classical elements with other musical styles.

When writing and discussing the *Fiddle Concerto*, it became necessary to find a word to characterize the way the piece incorporates multiple musical genres. Since it chiefly combines the styles of two different traditions, American fiddling and classical violin, it is tempting to describe the piece as a "crossover" work. However, as he explained in an interview for Geoffrey Himes of *No Depression* magazine in 2003, O'Connor feels uncomfortable with the word "crossover" because it implies an artist from one genre taking a brief detour to a different genre, as a novelty or an attempt to gain followers. According to O'Connor:

I have trouble with that terminology, because I don't feel like I'm crossing over. I don't feel like I'm just visiting jazz or classical music; I feel like I've come to live there. Too often a 'crossover' project is the idea of some record company guy who says, 'Hey, let's take this person and that person out of their element and have them do something they don't know much about and try to sell some records.'¹

However, O'Connor admits that the "crossover" categorization has been used by recording labels to bring his albums, including the *Fiddle Concerto*, to a wider audience of listeners and musicians.² Given these considerations, I will use the term "intertextual" most often when discussing the multiple styles encompassed in O'Connor's compositions and performances. Rather than being a musician from one genre that briefly visited another genre as an experiment, O'Connor feels at home in the American fiddling text

¹ Geoffrey Himes, "Mark O'Connor—String Ties," *No Depression; The Journal of Roots Music*, issue 49 (December 2003), accessed October 13, 2016. <http://nodepression.com/article/mark-oconnor-string-ties>.

² Ibid.

and the classical music text. His multi-stylistic works are composed of musical styles that become interrelated and interdependent.

CHAPTER 1

THE CLASSICAL VIOLIN CONCERTO

To understand Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* in the larger context of the violin concerto form requires first a brief examination of the elements that make up a classical violin concerto, and the players and composers that made important innovations in the genre.

Origins of the Violin Concerto

First and foremost, the violin originated as a dance band instrument. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the violin's loud, bright tone made it ideal for accompanying social dances in Italy and France.³ Andrea Amati (c. 1505-1577) was the first of a long line of Italian luthiers who responded to the growing popularity of the violin. Amati began innovating the design for violins, and the instruments he and his descendants crafted allowed for unprecedented agility and command of the instrument, which in turn broadened the violin's capability to go beyond the dance band to the solo realm.⁴

Towards the latter part of the seventeenth century, Italian audiences were accustomed to the wide range of expressivity they heard on the operatic stage. Italian violinists developed such soloistic technique that the violin was the only instrument that could rival the voice in expressive range.⁵ No longer a lowly dance band instrument, the violin was now a virtuoso instrument, and players and audiences desired compositions to

³ Simon McVeigh, "The Violinists of the Baroque and Classical Periods," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin*, ed. Robin Stowall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 47.

⁴ John Dilworth, "The Violin and Bow--Origins and Development," in Stowall, 11-12.

⁵ McVeigh, 48.

reflect this new role.⁶

The Baroque Violin Concerto

Musicologists credit virtuoso violinist Giuseppe Torelli (1658-1709) with popularizing the earliest form of a violin concerto--a piece with a violin solo part featured from within a larger ensemble of string players.⁷ Torelli's *Six Concerti a Quattro* from 1692 were the first works of their kind to be published. Torelli's pieces codified several concerto form characteristics. His concerti are organized into three movements, one fast, one slow, and another fast. In the outer movements, imitative ritornelli alternate with solo episodes with idiomatic writing. The last ritornello is a return of the material from the first ritornello. The middle movements are in a different but related key to the outer movements, and feature the solo player accompanied by the basso continuo.⁸ These concerto elements remained standard well into the Classical era, and even endured strongly enough in the modern day that they can be heard in Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*.

In addition to Torelli, Archangelo Corelli (1653-1713) was an important composer and violinist in the developing genre of the violin concerto. He published twelve influential *concerto grossi* in 1712. In these pieces, the principal players of the orchestra serve as the soloists during concertino sections, which alternate with *ripieno*

⁶ Robin Stowall, "The Nineteenth-Century Bravura Tradition," in Stowall, 61.

⁷ Michael Talbot, "The Italian Concerto in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 37.

⁸ Stowall, 149.

sections featuring the full orchestra.⁹ Corelli's writing for the solo violins was idiomatic and imitated the *bel canto* Italian arias that were considered highest art at the time.¹⁰ As a performer, Corelli was known for "the improvised ornamentation of those slow movements that appear so bald on the printed page."¹¹ Other soloists who performed Corelli's compositions were also expected to ornament melodies lavishly as they played.¹² The practice of improvising music to enhance a composed melody helped set the stage for the thematic embellishment in later classical concerti, and the melodic variation in O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*.

As the violin concerto continued to evolve during the Baroque era, it took on the characteristics of the countries and people it represented. Italian concerti became increasingly virtuosic. Italian composers like Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) composed concerti with fast movements built on concise themes and driving rhythms, and slow movements that called for a singing tone and a high level of expressiveness. Italian Baroque-era composers like Vivaldi also continued to rely on operatic techniques in their pieces. Vivaldi set the soloist and the ensemble as opposing forces, balanced tension with release, and concluded movements with a synthesis of the ideas presented. Vivaldi's orchestral ritornelli present the themes and tonalities for the movement, and provide stability between passages of idiomatic figuration by which the soloist advances the

⁹ Talbot, 41.

¹⁰ Stowall, 63.

¹¹ McVeigh, 50.

¹² Ibid.

musical plan.¹³

Another important innovation from Vivaldi was the introduction of an indication for a cadenza before the final ritornello of a movement. In this concerto form, solo episodes would increase in length as the movement progressed. Often the final solo episode was heard over a pedal point, and the logical next step was for the composer to include indication for an independent, unaccompanied cadenza. By the Classical era cadenzas would become a standard part of a violin concerto.¹⁴ Vivaldi contributed several hundred other concerti to the instrumental repertoire, but his violin concerti are the most plentiful, and his innovations in form, treatment of themes, and cadenzas were an important milestone in the violin concerto genre.¹⁵

As Italian violin concerti reached the ears of audiences in Austria and Germany, Germanic composers like Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) gave the violin concerto their own treatment. Whereas Italian violin concerti were driven by the contrast between the solo and tutti elements, which highlighted the technical demands placed on the soloist, Bach instead merged the roles of the solo and the ensemble. Bach added ritornello themes with complex counterpoint integrated throughout the solo sections of his violin concerti, and allowed the ensemble to take on more of the virtuosic burden.¹⁶ As part of this integration, the tutti orchestra frequently interjects a short motive during solo passages, a technique we will also see in the *Fiddle Concerto*. The contrapuntal nature of

¹³ Arthur Hutchings, et al, "Concerto," Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40737>.

¹⁴ Hutchings, et al.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ David Yearsley, "The Concerto in Northern Europe to c. 1770," in Keefe, 56.

Bach's violin concerti retained the excitement of the Italian concerto, but added unprecedented complexity to the tutti/solo relationship.¹⁷ Bach's innovation added an element of depth to the violin concerto genre; more than just an avenue for showcasing the soloist's ability, the violin concerto provided the opportunity for a composer to develop serious musical ideas.

As early eighteenth-century Italian virtuoso violinists travelled and performed in France, the violin concerto rose as a prominent genre in that country as well. French audiences initially rejected the indulgence of Italian virtuosity, but the composer most responsible for reconciling the violin concerto to the French aesthetic was Jean Marie Leclair (1697-1764).¹⁸ Leclair's violin concerti called for new heights of technical ability on the violin, including double and triple stops, fast passagework, arpeggios, double trills, and large shifts into upper positions, while simultaneously requiring the poise and charm characteristic of French music.¹⁹ The influence of these early innovators from Italy, Germany, and France can be heard in O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*, which draws on the forms and sounds of Baroque concerti.

At the close of the Baroque era, leading composers from Italian, Germanic, and French traditions had both broadened audience's understanding of the technical capabilities of the violin, and had codified a formal plan for the violin concerto. The form included a first movement constructed with four tuttis and three solo sections; the first tutti presenting the themes for the movement, the second tutti in the dominant key area,

¹⁷ David Yearsley, "The Concerto in Northern Europe to c. 1770," in Keefe, 56.

¹⁸ McVeigh, 58.

¹⁹ Yearsley, 65.

the third tutti modulating back to the tonic key, and the fourth tutti to close out the movement. The middle solo section, known as a “fantasy” episode, later became known as the development section in Classical-era concerti.²⁰ Middle movements were slow, and last movements were upbeat. Composers in the eras to come would look to the concerti from these Baroque-era composers as a model for their own innovations in the genre.

The Classical-Era Violin Concerto

In the later part of the eighteenth century, composers historically premiered their own pieces, and violin concertos offered composers who were violinists "an ideal opportunity to demonstrate high-level musicianship as both a composer and a performer."²¹ This was a benefit Mark O'Connor took advantage of in premiering and popularizing his *Fiddle Concerto* in the twentieth century. However, with the dawn of the Classical era came contributions to the violin concerto genre from composers whose primary instruments were not the violin, and their conception of the violin concerto included a larger role for the orchestra. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was a brilliant keyboard player and his piano concerti are one of his most lasting legacies, but he was an accomplished violinist as well and his five violin concerti were another step forward for the genre.²² In Mozart's violin concerti the orchestra had a larger role taking part in musical dialogue with the soloist. In Mozart's time, a fuller orchestra was becoming standard in violin concerti. Mozart wrote parts for oboes and horns in addition

²⁰ Hutchings, et al.

²¹ Simon P. Keefe, "The Concerto from Mozart to Beethoven: Aesthetic and Stylistic Perspectives," in Keefe, 71.

²² Ibid.

to the string section in his first, second, fourth, and fifth violin concerti. For his third he added flutes to the ensemble. In Classical-era violin concerti like Mozart's, orchestra players, especially the individual wind voices, rise out of the texture to converse with the violin solo, either interjecting short thoughts during solo sections, or playing countermelodies in conjunction with the solo line.²³ O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* contains similar passages, where individual instruments from the orchestra present new themes or interact with the solo violin.

Like Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was another composer most known for his piano concerti, as well as his notable contribution to the symphonic repertoire. However, Beethoven's lone violin concerto, from 1806, took the Mozartean conception of the orchestral part even further. Beethoven's violin concerto features even more creative use of orchestral timbres contrasting with the solo line.²⁴ By Beethoven's time violin concerti featured an even fuller symphonic score including clarinets, bassoons, trumpets, and timpani.²⁵ Owing to Mozart, Beethoven, and other Classical-era composers, the violin concerto evolved to a more complex symphonic composition in which a large ensemble of many different colors and timbres converse with the solo violin. When composing his *Fiddle Concerto*, O'Connor listened to Beethoven's violin concerto as well as Beethoven's symphonies as a model for using the colors of the

²³ Hutchings, et al.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ludwig van Beethoven, *Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra Op. 61*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Hartel, 1862-90). Accessed October 9, 2016, [http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_in_D_major,_Op.61_\(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_in_D_major,_Op.61_(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van)).

orchestra to achieve a mixture of sounds.²⁶

The Romantic Violin Concerto

As the Classical era came to a close in the early 1800s, composers began to use the violin concerto to evoke the expressive intensity that came to characterize the Romantic era. One important composer in this process was Giovanni Batista Viotti (1755-1824). Viotti's violin concerti remain popular today because Viotti combined the best of violin music to date; virtuosic flair, the sonorous capacity of the violin's G-string and the soaring brilliance of the E-string, the bold drama of opera, the symphonic style of the great classical-era symphonies, and the expressive intensity of the French aesthetic.²⁷ In Viotti's hands, the violin concerto was established as a dominant force in the coming Romantic era.

Despite the orchestra's elevated role in violin concerti beginning in the Classical era, the genre continued to flourish as an avenue for displaying the full range of technical capabilities of the solo violin. No other violin concerti illustrate this better than Niccoló Paganini's (1782-1840) six violin concerti, written between 1815 and 1830. Paganini's concerti utilized the full range of the G and D strings, required single and double harmonics, left-hand pizzicato, and complex double stops.²⁸ Even in the twenty-first century Paganini's violin concerti remain some of the most technically difficult and virtuosic works in the repertoire. Paganini's writing for the violin influenced O'Connor as

²⁶ Mark O'Connor, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2016.

²⁷ McVeigh, 60.

²⁸ Hutchings, et al.

he was composing his own works for the violin repertoire, including the *Fiddle Concerto*. O'Connor even composed a set of six solo caprices using Paganini's own *24 Caprices for Solo Violin, Op. 1* (1802-1817) as a model.²⁹

Viotti, Paganini, and other nineteenth-century composers expanded what players and audiences thought was technically possible on the violin. However, some composers reacted against what they viewed as this indulgence of virtuosity for its own sake.

Proponents of this movement advocated that concerto composers should strive for the higher artistic ideals reached in symphonic and chamber works.³⁰ At the same time, progressive composers began to regard the established traditions of forms, especially the opening ritornello in the first movement of a concerto, as "redundant and archaic."³¹

Composers were inspired to experiment with what had by that time become standard form for violin concerti. One violin concerto that successfully stepped away from the traditional formal rules, and "reconciled the apparent conflict between virtuoso display and compositional seriousness," was Felix Mendelssohn's (1809-1847) *Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64*, finished in 1844.³² Formally, Mendelssohn linked all three movements in his violin concerto into a continuous whole and displaced the first movement cadenza so that it precedes the recapitulation and serves as functional part of the movement.³³ Prior to the nineteenth century, composers, in notating a space for a cadenza, gave the option for performers to compose or improvise their own cadenzas

²⁹ O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

³⁰ Hutchings, et al.

³¹ Stephan D. Lindeman, "The Nineteenth-Century Piano Concerto," in Keefe, 101.

³² Hutchings, et al.

³³ Ibid.

based on a movement's themes. Mendelssohn's choice to compose a cadenza reflected the increasing separation in the mid-nineteenth century between composing and performing as professions.³⁴

Responding to Mendelssohn's innovation in his violin concerto, composers in the second half of the nineteenth continued to experiment with new methods of formal arrangement and treatment of themes between orchestra and violin soloist.³⁵ For example, Max Bruch's (1838-1920) popular *Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor*, initially premiered in 1866, broke from Classical-era concerto form with a first movement that "is itself an extended rhetorical introduction, led by the violin, to the following two movements."³⁶ A similar example is Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's (1840-1893) violin concerto, finished in 1878. Tchaikovsky's deviation from eighteenth-century concerto tradition comes when the soloist enters after a brief orchestral introduction. The "expressive material and figuration are not associated with any thematic exposition; that occurs abruptly only in bar twenty-eight, with the soloist entirely in the lead."³⁷ Following Mendelssohn's example, Tchaikovsky's cadenza, preceded by a large tutti, leads into the recapitulation. Composing at the very end of the Romantic Era, Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) was also influenced by Mendelssohn's violin concerto, which he had studied as a student. Sibelius's violin concerto, from 1903, features the opening melody presented immediately by the violin. Sibelius's composed cadenza serves as the development section in its

³⁴ Hutchings et al.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

entirety.³⁸ By the turn of the twentieth century, composers had found new methods for treating form, themes, and cadenzas in the violin concerto to serve the expressive ideals of the romantic era, but further changes to the genre awaited in the era to come.

The Modern Violin Concerto

The period of time between the two World Wars has been named the "golden age of violin playing" for the many distinctive violinists that rose to fame during that time, and the increase in music composed for the violin.³⁹ At the same time, the dissemination of the phonograph to the public brought violin music to the widest audiences yet. Long concerti were unable to fit on a 78 rpm record and gave way to short show-pieces as the best way for a young virtuoso to show off his or her technical skills. Composers instead looked to the violin concerto genre as an outlet for social commentary and a way to communicate pride, patriotism, or dissension, as well as a way for composers to give voice to their most intimate feelings. For example, Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) used his first violin concerto to communicate both the voice of a nation and his personal thoughts. The piece was finished in 1948, but upon its completion Shostakovich feared it was too critical of the Stalin regime, and he kept it hidden until after Stalin's death in 1955. The piece has four large movements with a composed cadenza linking the third movement to the finale. The music is evocative and grotesque, sarcastic and pained, brilliant and dark. It is intensely personal to Shostakovich and includes a musical

³⁸ Michael Steinberg, "Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto in E Minor," San Francisco Symphony Program Notes, accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.sfsymphony.org/Watch-Listen-Learn/Read-Program-Notes/Program-Notes/MENDELSSOHN-Violin-Concerto-in-E-minor.aspx>.

³⁹ Eric Wen, "The Twentieth Century," in Stowall, 84.

depiction of his name, yet also portrays the struggle of the entire Russian nation against fascism.⁴⁰ Similar to the personal nature of Shostakovich's writing, Alban Berg (1885-1935) wrote a violin concerto in 1935 as a requiem for a young woman to whom he was very close.⁴¹ Berg constructed the piece using numbers he found significant and note combinations that represented significant people in his life. Berg and his teacher, Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), both pioneered new approaches to thematic construction and harmonic language in their concerti. Schoenberg's 1936 concerto was based on his twelve-tone harmonic language and stretched the ears and minds of audiences.⁴² Innovative composers like Shostakovich, Berg, and Schoenberg wrote violin concerti that were structurally and stylistically different from their predecessors, and helped the violin concerto continue to remain an ever-changing and relevant genre. The experimental nature of O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*, which is a fusion of fiddle and classical violin elements, continues this evolution in the concerto genre.

Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, political turbulence in Europe drove many talented composers and performers to move temporarily or permanently to the United States. Newly-established American conservatories produced large numbers of outstanding violinists, and the United States became a new center for

⁴⁰ Michael Steinberg, "Shostakovich: Violin Concerto No. 1 in A Minor, Op. 77 (99)," San Francisco Symphony Program Notes, October, 2015, accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.sfsymphony.org/Watch-Listen-Learn/Read-Program-Notes/Program-Notes/Shostakovich-Concerto-No-1-in-A-minor-for-Violin-a.aspx>.

⁴¹ Rachel Barton Pine, "Berg Violin Concerto," Program Notes by Rachel Barton Pine, accessed October 16, 2016, http://industry.rachelbartonpine.com/rep_notes_view.php?id=2.

⁴² Herbert Glass, "Violin Concerto, Arnold Schoenberg," Los Angeles Philharmonic Music and Musicians Database, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.laphil.com/philpedia/music/violin-concerto-arnold-schoenberg>.

musical innovation.⁴³ In a search for an “American” musical style, composers began to compose concertos for all instruments that reflected the diverse musical tastes of America. One way composers found to give their pieces a uniquely “American” sound was to integrate jazz elements into their compositions. Perhaps the most famous example of this is *Rhapsody in Blue*, composed for piano and jazz band by George Gershwin (1898-1937) in 1924, but orchestrated in the form most often performed today by Ferde Grofé (1892-1972). The piece brought blues and jazz stylings onto the symphonic stage. While not titled a concerto, the piece showcases a solo instrument against the backdrop of an orchestra. Another composer who wrote a concerto for a specific jazz musician was Aaron Copland (1900-1990), who took a commission for a concerto from jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman in 1947. The resulting concerto not only made use of Goodman's proficiency in swing and jazz playing, but “endures as a shining example of Copland's musical vocabulary. His characteristic idioms - from the open, sparse chords and woodwind-based timbre of *Our Town* to the unmistakably Western American sound of *Billy the Kid*.”⁴⁴ These twentieth-century compositions that cross-pollinated the concerto form with American vernacular musical styles were the first in a unique repertoire of American concerti that also includes O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*.

American fiddler, composer, and pedagogue Mark O'Connor (b. 1961), grew up learning to play fiddle and jazz music from musical greats Benny Thomasson (1909-1984) and Stéphane Grappelli (1908-1997). In 1992 O'Connor turned his talent towards

⁴³ Wen, 88.

⁴⁴ Jessica Schilling, “Clarinet Concerto, Aaron Copland,” Los Angeles Philharmonic Music and Musicians Database, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.laphil.com/philpedia/music/clarinet-concerto-aaron-copland>.

the composition of a full-length concerto for violin and orchestra.⁴⁵ The piece is a product of O'Connor's fiddle-playing roots, but also features the best elements of what has become the violin concerto genre: virtuosic solo passages of intricate figures integrated with beautiful, soaring melodies and driving dance music. The piece is innovative, musically sophisticated, and takes a place in the rich tradition of violin concerti as well as alongside other great intertextual American works from the 20th century.

⁴⁵ "The Fiddle Concerto," Mark O'Connor Downloadable Sheet Music, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.sitemason.com/site/kGwSPe/fiddle.concerto.html>.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN FIDDLELING

Early American Fiddling

American fiddle music started out as music to accompany dancing. Settlers in the young United States brought their dance and musical traditions with them when they immigrated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁶ Fiddle players evolved different playing styles to accompany dancers in the regions where they settled. In notes accompanying a Library of Congress anthology of fiddle tunes, Alan Jabbour wrote, “The styles range[d] from intricate to simple, fluid to choppy, metrically regular to syncopated, and the technical ability range[d] from dazzling to prosaic.”⁴⁷

By 1900, four distinct regional fiddling styles had evolved in the United States: New England, Cajun, Southeastern, and Texan fiddling.⁴⁸ New England fiddlers drew heavily on English dance genres and tune types.⁴⁹ British reels and hornpipes became American hoedowns, and the American polka and waltz evolved from other British, Scottish, or Irish duple- and triple-meter tune types.⁵⁰ Cajun fiddling rose out of the influx of French, African, and Caribbean settlers to the Bayou area in the nineteenth

⁴⁶ Chris Goertzen, "Fiddling," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, January 31, 2014, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2256537>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Stacy Phillips, *Contest Fiddling* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay, 1989), 6.

⁴⁹ Alan Jabbour, ed., *American Fiddle Tunes*, Folk Music of the United States, Library of Congress Recorded Sound Section, Music Division, Recording Laboratory AFS-L62, accessed September 16, 2016, http://www.loc.gov/folklife/LP/AmFiddleTunesLiner_opt.pdf.

⁵⁰ Goertzen.

century.⁵¹ Cajun-style dances favored a shuffle-pattern bowing style achieved with short, quick bow strokes, as well as twin-fiddling, a method of increasing the fiddle's volume by adding a second fiddler playing a lower harmony or octave.⁵² Southeastern fiddling, especially that of the Appalachian region, favored the modal sounds of Scottish and Irish tune types and a "shove and pull" bowing style made of short, articulate strokes that provided strong rhythm for dancers. In addition to music for social dances, Southeastern-style fiddle playing served as accompaniment for the songs and ballads that were a part of the oral Appalachian tradition.⁵³ Finally, Texas-style fiddlers favored a slower version of tunes, with smooth bow strokes that came to be known as "long bow" style in contrast to the "shove and pull" style. Smooth bow strokes were achieved by playing with a loose right wrist. The slower tune tempos allowed for elaborate ornamentation and fiddlers modified and extended their tunes while avoiding repetition.⁵⁴ One fiddler responsible for introducing Texas-style fiddling to a wider audience was Alexander "Eck" Robertson (1887-1975), who, along with Henry C. Gilliland (1845-1924), made what would become the first recordings in the "hillbilly music" category for the Victor Talking Machine Company, in 1922.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Michael Doucet "A Short History of Cajun Fiddling," Fiddle.com, accessed October 14, 2016, http://www.fiddle.com/_mndata/fiddle/uploaded_files/Fall94-ShortCajunHist.pdf.

⁵² Chris Haigh, "Cajun Fiddling," Fiddling Around the World, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://fiddlingaround.co.uk/cajun/index.html>.

⁵³ Jeff Todd Titon, "Fiddle," Encyclopedia of Appalachia, last modified February 28, 2011, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.encyclopediaofappalachia.com/entry.php?rec=80>.

⁵⁴ "The Origins of the Texas Style of Traditional Old-Time Fiddling," Texas Old-Time Fiddlers Association, accessed October 18, 2016, http://www.totfa.org/about/stories/texas_fiddle.htm.

⁵⁵ Jill S. Seeber, "Robertson, Alexander [Eck]," Handbook of Texas Online, Texas State Historical Association, June 15, 2010, modified October 3, 2013, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/foam>.

In his 1922 recording of the tune "Sally Goodin'," Roberson began with the two-part tune, a hoedown, and played twelve additional variations. Other fiddlers who heard the recording emulated Robertson's style of melodic variation. The idea of adding heavy embellishment and varying sections spawned such innovation and virtuosity among fiddlers that fiddle contests sprung up in Texas and spread to the rest of the United States as a venue for fiddlers to showcase their skills. Author and fiddler Stacy Phillips published two books on contest fiddling, and described the fiddling style that developed at competitions as "a fine art of controlled improvisation."⁵⁶

While it may have sounded improvisational, the Texas fiddling style became a virtuosic genre that, like classical violin playing, required mastery of difficult fingerings and full control of the bow. While many players in the 1920s and 30s became known for this brilliant style of fiddling, Benny Thomasson (1909-1984) did the most in creating and disseminating modern Texas-fiddling style. Thomasson's fiddling style was a combination of the melodic variation and embellishment pioneered by Eck Robertson, but was also informed by other musical styles Thomasson absorbed into his playing. The impact of Thomasson's fiddling style came to be heard at such major contests as the National Old Time Fiddlers' Contest in Weiser, Idaho, the Grand Masters competition in Nashville, Tennessee, as well as the state and regional contests that emerged in the 1950s and 60s.⁵⁷ Part of this chapter will be an examination of Thomasson's upbringing, career, and outlook on fiddle playing, to see that Thomasson was one of the first fiddle players to cross-pollinate fiddle music with other genres. Thomasson's fiddling and teaching had an

⁵⁶ Seeber.

⁵⁷ Phillips, *Contest Fiddling*, 6.

important influence on Mark O'Connor's career.

Benny Thomasson's Life and Career

Benny Thomasson was one of ten children in a musical family from Gatesville, Texas. When Thomasson was young, his father was a fiddler already taking prizes in local and regional fiddle contests.⁵⁸ During the years Thomasson was learning to fiddle, Eck Robertson was a friend of the Thomasson family and a frequent visitor to the household. The older man's fiddling style had an influence on the way young Thomasson learned to play.

Thomasson entered his first fiddle contest in 1928, at age nineteen. Dismayed when he placed sixtieth, Thomasson decided to work more on extending his tunes with more variations and adding embellishments to make them flashier.⁵⁹ Thomasson had the benefit a new generation of musicians enjoyed: phonograph recordings of artists. He listened to recordings of other musicians to work on absorbing new style characteristics into his own playing. Thomasson listened to Eck Robertson's recordings, but also picked up techniques listening to records of jazz violinists Joe Venuti (1903-1978) and Stéphane Grappelli.⁶⁰ In an interview with David Garelick at the 1973 fiddle contest in Weiser, ID, Thomasson talks of his influences, including Robertson, Venuti, Grapelli, Old-Time

⁵⁸ Mark O'Connor, "In Benny Thomasson's Own Words," *Parting Shots; From a Musician's Perspective*, reprinted from "An Interview with Benny Thomasson," *John Edwards Memorial Foundation (JEMF) Quarterly*, vol. 10, part 3 (Autumn 1974): #35, by Dave Garelick, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://markoconnorblog.blogspot.com/2015/09/in-benny-thomassons-own-words.html>.

⁵⁹ O'Connor, Garelick.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

fiddler Clark Kessinger (1896-1975), and a handful of Western Swing musicians like Joe Holley (1917-1987), C.G. "Sleepy" Johnson (1909-1976), Bob Wills (1905-1975), and classically trained Florian ZaBach (1918-2006).⁶¹ The genre of western swing was itself already a hybrid style born of "the infectious swinging urban dance rhythms of 30's and 40's jazz with the 'down home' sounds of rural Texas."⁶² Thomasson was interviewed by Dave Garelick at the 1973 National Old-Time Fiddlers Contest in Weiser, Idaho, and of his experience hearing and playing western swing, Thomasson said:

I think it really helps it, because it... in that western style, western swing, you have to have perfect timing. It really works and helps your timing. Actually, used to, before I'd play in a fiddle contest, I'd play a swing tune, that'd bring me down to my perfect timing, you see, on these hoedowns. I never told anybody that before, but it does. You play something like "Draggin' the Bow" or something like that, you know, and you've got a "sock" rhythm time on that you see. Positive timing.⁶³

While contest fiddling had developed as a genre of its own by the time Thomasson was competing, it still maintained its roots as music for dancing and Thomasson's integration of western swing with Texas-style fiddling kept the strong relationship between fiddling and dancing.

Thomasson credited his openness to all sorts of music with creating his unique style. By listening to other styles of fiddle playing, Thomasson developed a few specific techniques that came to be pillars of Texas-style fiddling. He took familiar tunes from

⁶¹ O'Connor, Garelick.

⁶² Chris Haigh, "Western Swing Fiddle," Fiddling Around the World, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://fiddlingaround.co.uk/westernswing/index.html>.

⁶³ O'Connor, Garelick.

Oldtime and Southeastern fiddlers and slowed them down to allow for more intricate melody lines and smoother bow changes. Thomasson held his bow with his thumb under the frog, as he felt this helped keep his wrist relaxed and he could make his bow changes as smooth as possible.⁶⁴ From western swing players Thomasson absorbed melodic inventiveness and the use of hemiolas and syncopation to break up a smooth, steady stream of notes.⁶⁵ For example, in Thomasson's version of the hoedown "Sally Goodin," transcribed by Laura Jane Houle for a dissertation on Texas-style fiddling, Thomasson played eight measures of the melody with emphasis on the big beats of the measure, and then another version of the same eight bars with eighth-notes combined with slurs to emphasize a hemiola (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: "Sally Goodin" Performed by Benny Thomasson. Measures 32-50, from "Carrying on the Tradition--A Performance Practice Analysis of Stylistic Evolution in Texas Contest Style Fiddling," Master's thesis, Texas Tech University, 2014, by Laura Jane Houle, 107.



⁶⁴ Phillips, *Contest Fiddling*, 7.

⁶⁵ Contest fiddling, 8.

In addition to smooth bowing and melodic embellishment, another technique Thomasson popularized in his contest fiddling was shifting into upper positions for several measures at a time. Prior to Thomasson's time, other fiddle styles may have included a shift to a higher position for only a few notes.⁶⁶ In the excerpt above, Thomasson shifted back and forth between first and third positions on the fiddle, remaining in third position for two or three measures at a time. The excerpt above also demonstrates how Thomasson used double stops in the form of open-string drones to fill out his melody line. Double stopping and drones was a technique Thomasson picked up from Eck Robertson and other fiddlers for ornamenting melodies.⁶⁷ By combining different techniques learned from varying musical styles, Thomasson crafted a fiddling style that helped him win fiddle contests all over United States.

Benny Thomasson won the Texas State Championship fifteen times and the World Championship three times in a row (1955, 1956 and 1957). In 1974 he won the Championship division at the National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest in Weiser, Idaho.⁶⁸ The previous year, in 1973, was when 64-year old Thomasson heard the 11-year old Mark O'Connor play at the Weiser contest, and the young boy became his protégé.⁶⁹ Thomasson's mentorship of O'Connor would become one of O'Connor's most important

⁶⁶ Phillips, *Contest Fiddling*, 8.

⁶⁷ Laura Jane Houle, "Carrying on the Tradition—A Performance Practice Analysis of Stylistic Evolution in Texas Contest Style Fiddling" (master's thesis, Texas Tech University, 2014), 39-40, accessed October 16, 2016, <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/ttu-ir/bitstream/handle/2346/58838/HOULE-THESIS-2014.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁶⁸ National Fiddler Hall of Fame. Accessed October 26, 2016, <http://nationalfiddlerhalloffame.org/>.

⁶⁹ O'Connor, Garelick.

formative relationships, influencing O'Connor's career and compositions, including the *Fiddle Concerto*.

In addition to Mark O'Connor, Thomasson mentored other young fiddlers to be open-minded and progressive about the trajectory of American fiddling. Thomasson believed that the future of American string music was not in preserving fiddling as it had been, but in constantly evolving and encompassing new styles.⁷⁰ In September 2016, O'Connor published excerpts of the 1973 Garelick interview with Thomasson in his blog. In prefacing the article, he talked about Thomasson's outlook on music:

The human qualities in this interview that stand out to me in particular are what a progressive musician he was and that progressivism is what he believed wholeheartedly and unashamedly. He was not a traditionalist at all, not a traditional fiddler, even though he was entering old-time fiddling contests during his entire adult life. The very mottos of those contests were to preserve the previous two generation's renditions of tunes. He lived his life at the edge of a musical cliff with people trying to shove him off daily...Benny initially taught me to be in his very image. In the beginning, it was a fiddle contest winner that no one could beat. Later, it was someone with the overarching visualization of an American string player who was creative, responsible for a body of repertoire and to help usher in a sea of change for string playing.⁷¹

With Benny Thomasson as his teacher, it is no surprise that Mark O'Connor rose to dominate the fiddle contest scene of the 1970s and 80s, and then went on to advocate for the cross-pollination of many different fiddling styles into a uniquely American string style.

⁷⁰ O'Connor, Garelick.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Mark O'Connor's Early Training

As a child growing up in Seattle (b. 1961), Mark O'Connor's first instrument was the guitar, but the instrument he felt the most connection with was the violin. His mother loved classical music and the young O'Connor grew up listening to his mother's records of the iconic violin concertos of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky.⁷² O'Connor's career as a multi-faceted musician can be traced to this early influence as well as the opportunities he had as a young player to learn from fiddler Benny Thomasson and French jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli. Both taught him the nuances of their musical styles and the art of improvising. In *Mark O'Connor: The Championship Years*, Stacy Phillips relays O'Connor's words about his working relationship with Thomasson:

He reworked old tunes and in that sense he was very much a composer. He would compose variations and in his words, 'round out' the tunes...He saw that I had the ability to make up my own variations even though I thought that everything he played was exactly what I wanted to do. He would teach me his exact notes if I wanted, but he would say, "Now, Mark, you could make this even better."⁷³

Young O'Connor sometimes spent days at Thomasson's house: watching, listening, and working to emulate the older man's playing style. More of a musical mentor than just a fiddle teacher, Thomasson taught O'Connor his own fiddling style, but also how to absorb any music he liked and make it his own.

Under Thomasson's tutelage, O'Connor's contest wins started to add up. In 1975, at age thirteen, O'Connor won the Grand Master Fiddle Championships in Nashville. He

⁷² Mark O'Connor, email message to author, October 2, 2016.

⁷³ Stacy Phillips and Mark O'Connor, *Mark O'Connor: The Championship Years* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay, 1991), 16.

went on to win again in 1980 and 1982.⁷⁴ He was also a four-time Grand Champion (1979, 1980, 1981 and 1984) at the National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest in Weiser, Idaho.⁷⁵

O'Connor's contest-winning fiddling was a product of the style he learned from Benny Thomasson plus his own addition of even more virtuosic technical elements that had previously been heard more in classical violin playing. O'Connor used facile shifts into the high positions and flawless execution of difficult double stops to ornament his tunes. For example, in O'Connor's version of "Sally Goodin," also transcribed by Laura Jane Houle, O'Connor first played eight bars that were nearly identical to Thomasson's version of the same measures. In the next eight bars, O'Connor combined shifting back and forth more frequently between first position and third position with open string drones (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: "Sally Goodin" Performed by Mark O'Connor. Measures 1-19, from Houle, "Carrying on the Tradition--A Performance Practice Analysis of Stylistic Evolution in Texas Contest Style Fiddling," 111.



In his contest fiddling, O'Connor used difficult double stops that extended beyond simple

⁷⁴ "Past Championship Winners," Grand Master Fiddler, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://grandmasterfiddler.com/past-winners/>.

⁷⁵ "Past Winners," National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest and Festival, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.fiddlecontest.org/past-winners-2/>.

open string drones. For example, in Stacy Phillips's transcription of O'Connor's tune "German Waltz," O'Connor uses thirds, fourths, and sixths to harmonize his melody line (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: "German Waltz" Performed by Mark O'Connor. Measures 1-8, from *Contest Fiddling* by Stacy Phillips, Pacific, MO: Mel Bay, 1989, 118.



Mark O'Connor's contest fiddling style showcased his remarkable technical ability and helped him win championships. Stylistic elements O'Connor used in his contest tunes, such as double stops, hemiolas, and embellishment, would show up later in O'Connor's compositions like the *Fiddle Concerto*. But fiddling contests were only the first chapter in O'Connor's musical career.

Shortly after graduating from high school, O'Connor auditioned and was hired to play guitar for a tour with the David Grisman Quintet and Stéphane Grappelli. As O'Connor shared with an editor of *No Depression* magazine in 2003, O'Connor had first heard Grappelli playing as a teenager and had "immediately fallen under the spell of the Frenchman's lyrical mingling of swing-jazz and gypsy folk music with [stylings of] guitarist Django Reinhardt."⁷⁶ Over the course of the tour, O'Connor had the opportunity to round out his musical training. He played violin duos with Grappelli on each show, and, according to O'Connor,

⁷⁶ Himes.

He really filled in the gaps for me--the singing quality I desired, the subtle use of vibrato. As ingrained as I was in the Texas style of fiddling, Stéphane freed me and opened me up to hear the whole world. He would take me aside and we would go over passages. He would grab my hand as if he were trying to channel his 70 years of experience into his little protégé.⁷⁷

In addition to tours with Grappelli and the Dave Grisman Quintet, O'Connor spent two years, starting in 1981, performing with The Dixie Dregs: an ensemble whose unique style came from the fusion of diverse genres such as swing, jazz, rock, and bluegrass.⁷⁸

With the conclusion of these tours, O'Connor moved to Nashville in 1983 to seek studio recording work.

Mark O'Connor's Studio Work

O'Connor moved to Nashville in his early twenties and soon became one of the most successful and sought-after studio musicians in country music. His first big recording break was with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's 1985 single "High Horse." He went on to play on albums with Randy Travis, Travis Tritt, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Waylon Jennings, Patty Loveless, Steve Earle, Reba McEntire, Kathy Mattea, and Lyle Lovett.⁷⁹ For 1990-1995 he was named the Country Music Association's Musician of the Year.⁸⁰ O'Connor had reached what some would consider to be the height of a successful music career. Yet his artistic focus was about to undergo a transformation. In 1988 O'Connor had received a request to compose a string quartet for the Santa Fe Chamber Music

⁷⁷ Himes.

⁷⁸ Steve Huey, "Dixie Dregs: Bio," AllMusic, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/the-dixie-dregs-mn0000125068/biography>.

⁷⁹ Himes.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Festival, which has a strong history of commissioning pieces each year by both established and up-and-coming contemporary composers.⁸¹ According to O'Connor, the Festival's directors "wanted to expand their commissioning program and look for outside composers to write for classical musicians."⁸² The commission was O'Connor's first compositional foray into the classical music realm, and it pointed his career in a new, unexpected direction. As he put it, "Life for me at age 29 got a lot more inspiring musically, but it also got a lot more complicated."⁸³

⁸¹ "Commissioned Works," Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival Summary of Commissioned Works 1980-2012, accessed October 1, 2016, <https://www.santafechambermusic.com/about/commissioned-works/>.

⁸² Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

⁸³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE *FIDDLE CONCERTO*: GENESIS AND COMPOSITION

Genesis

O'Connor's first composition for a classical music audience was the string quartet he composed for the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival.⁸⁴ He premiered the piece, *Quartet*, with violinist Daniel Phillips of the Orion Quartet, New York Philharmonic principal cellist Carter Brey, and internationally renowned bassist Edgar Meyer. The inclusion of the upright bass was a nod to the instrument's prominence in the American country music tradition. Edgar Meyer and O'Connor have collaborated on several subsequent projects, including the 1996 *Appalachia Waltz* album with cellist Yo Yo Ma.⁸⁵ O'Connor later felt his *Quartet* was more effectively performed by the traditional quartet of two violins, viola and cello rather than bluegrass musicians, and he re-scored the piece before publishing it.⁸⁶ O'Connor was inspired by the writing process and the positive response to his piece from the other ensemble members and the Festival audience.

When O'Connor returned to Nashville after the premiere of his *Quartet* in 1988, he found himself struggling to remain interested in studio work. In an email correspondence for this project in 2016, he said the feeling was "like a light bulb

⁸⁴ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

⁸⁵ Mark O'Connor, Yo Yo Ma, Edgar Meyer, "Appalachia Waltz," recorded September, 1996, Sony Classical, CD.

⁸⁶ Mark O'Connor, "Quartet," Mark O'Connor Sheet Music, accessed October 12, 2016, <http://www.sitemason.com/site/kGwSPe/quartet.html>.

flickering."⁸⁷ During this time he remembers hearing snippets of melodies in his head and trying them out on his violin. As he described it:

I began to experiment with some new musical material during my long hours as a studio session musician in Nashville. When there was a break in the action and the recording session producers needed an overdub from someone else on the studio floor, I began to construct new musical ideas and phrases inside my fiddle isolation booths with the mic turned off... I didn't really know what kind of genre my new music was going to lead toward. Initially I assumed it could be the beginning of another string quartet. But the new material seemed quite different in many ways. The striking themes began to dominate my everyday life and routine, actually robbing me of my interest in most anything else at the time, musically or otherwise. I simply could not get the themes out of my mind and they even began to haunt me in a way.⁸⁸

Finally, O'Connor recorded himself playing the tunes running through his head. By the end he had twenty-five minutes of music recorded, and the *Fiddle Concerto* was born.

Having preserved his musical thoughts to return to later, O'Connor went back to studio recording work. He won a Grammy for his own album *The New Nashville Cats* in 1991, but continued to feel less than completely fulfilled by the country music environment. As he puts it, "I wondered how much longer I was able to be a full-time session player with serious creative aspirations that were beyond that environment."⁸⁹ One day, he packed up his fiddle after a recording session, cancelled all future sessions, and decided never to return to the country music studio. In his words,

[I was beginning] an unknown journey that I could barely explain to someone if asked. I really couldn't even make much sense of it myself. It

⁸⁷ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

was quite frightening to leave this great job I had worked myself to, all the way up from nothing in Nashville. But at the same time, it was even more frightening to ignore my new artistic urges from within. I was going to leave the best job I ever had as a musician, one that made me a wealthy person in fact, and leave it all for a nameless world, one with only a fanciful muse and no certain future. Justifiably, I wanted to work on this new music I had created and give it all the time it required for some kind of result. Wherever that music was leading me, it was the place I was going to have to go. I listened back to the 25-minute tape I had made 6 months earlier, and I recognized it then as no string quartet at all. It was rather a violin concerto. It seemed that I had my work cut out for me, and I [began work on it].⁹⁰

In order to help his new work take shape, O'Connor set to work learning to compose for an orchestra.

Composition

O'Connor's first step was to return to the violin concerti he had heard as a child on his mother's turntable: the violin concerti of Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky. He studied the scores of Beethoven's symphonies as a model for symphonic writing. As an accomplished string player, O'Connor felt the most comfortable composing and orchestrating for the string sections of the orchestra, but he expanded his knowledge about writing for the woodwind, brass, and percussion sections by studying Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's 1873 *Principles of Orchestration*.⁹¹

O'Connor kept his work on the *Fiddle Concerto* a secret until it was finished, at which point he sent the project to his press agent to seek out a commission. The Santa Fe

⁹⁰ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Symphony Orchestra and Chorus was eager to get O'Connor back for a feature performance after he had appeared again at the previous summer's Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. They officially commissioned the Concerto and scheduled a premiere performance.⁹² O'Connor made the definitive recording of the piece a few years later, in 1995, for the Warner Brothers label with the Concordia Orchestra and Marin Alsop conducting.

Overview

O'Connor's score calls for a large orchestra with standard instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons, contra bassoon, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbal, snare drum, bass drum, xylophone harp, and a full string section. The piece has three movements: a fast movement, and slow inner movement, and a fast final movement. O'Connor saw this organization of movements as his "first musical bridge to the fiddling world--that of a fiddle contest round consisting of a hoedown, waltz and tune of choice."⁹³ These three genres are the typical requirements that make up a fiddle contest "set." First, a hoedown is a lively tune in duple meter. They are sometimes also called breakdowns, and they are the first song required in the three-song round at fiddle contests. "Sallie Goodin," the song Eck Robertson recorded for Victor back 1922, is a hoedown. Over time, the hoedown evolved in much the same way that the first-movement form of the classical concerto grew. The

⁹² Buckley, *Tucson Citizen*.

⁹³ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

second required genre in a fiddle contest set is a slower-tempo waltz, much like the contrasting second movement of a concerto. A waltz is a tune in triple meter that originated to accompany the couples' dance of the same name.⁹⁴ Descending from the German *Ländler* of the late 18th century, waltzes also have a strong presence in classical works.⁹⁵ The classical waltz was popularized by Viennese composer Johannes Brahms and Johann Strauss and remained relevant through the works of Richard Strauss and Maurice Ravel.⁹⁶

Finally, the last contest requirement is regarded the "tune of choice," or any tune type other than a hoedown or waltz.⁹⁷ Most frequently, fiddlers choose a jig, polka, two-step, swing tune, or rag.⁹⁸ "In the case of my new composition," O'Connor wrote, "the 'tune of choice' genre for my third movement was to be a jig in 6/8 meter."⁹⁹ A jig is also a dance type that has roots both in fiddling and in classical music. Both types of jig (Fr. *gigue*) descend from dances known for vigorous up and down movement and even leaping, and appear most often in 6/8 meter.¹⁰⁰ O'Connor capitalized on the similarity of

⁹⁴ Jabbour.

⁹⁵ "Waltz." The Oxford Dictionary of Music, 2nd ed. rev., Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e10885>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bruce Campbell, Contest Chairmain, "General Contest Rules," National Old Time Fiddlers' Contest and Festival, December, 2015, accessed September 14, 2016, <http://www.fiddlecontest.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-Packet.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Campbell.

⁹⁹ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Dean-Smith, "Jig," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, (Oxford University Press), accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/14307>.

affect between fiddle competition sets and a fast/slow/fast design being the typical concerto form with regards to tempo.

The first movement of the *Fiddle Concerto* features two themes: a hoedown and a waltz. O'Connor explained that these were two types of tunes he studied most as a child, so they were natural choices as melodic material for his first movement.¹⁰¹ By basing the first movement of the Concerto on two contrasting themes, O'Connor remained connected to the fiddle contest scene where he had launched his career in the 1980s, but also kept his concerto rooted in classical tradition with familiar forms.

O'Connor composed the second movement of the *Fiddle Concerto* as a nod to the Baroque roots of the violin concerto. "In my slow second movement," he wrote, "I wanted to find a new connection between the 'American fiddle' and the classical symphony orchestra through musical inspiration of the Baroque period."¹⁰² The melody is simple and the orchestration sparse, much like middle movements of Vivaldi in which only the soloist and basso continuo play.¹⁰³ O'Connor wrote:

I see this slow and more beautiful music of the concerto as more of a story, a tapestry and even a ballet dance in a sense. I envision dancers in my mind when I perform that movement, and most specifically when I composed it. I have always been inspired by all dance forms as both my mother and father were good ballroom dance instructors and my sister for a time was a professional dancer and studied with Northwest Ballet as a child.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Michael Thomas Roeder, *The History of the Concerto*, (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1994), 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

The third movement of the *Fiddle Concerto* is a jig, with an additional waltz section included in the middle. The two outer movements of the *Fiddle Concerto* contain markings at mm. 89 and 63, respectively, for cadenzas to be either composed ahead of time or improvised by the soloist.¹⁰⁵ O'Connor himself is a gifted improvisational fiddler, and improvises his cadenzas when he performs the work. He admits even improvising the cadenzas when recording the piece in 1995.¹⁰⁶ Regarding cadenzas for the *Fiddle Concerto*, O'Connor's preference is clear; "Improvisation is quite exciting in this setting and of course I encourage it if it is possible from the soloist." However, he composed his concerto for other people to perform as well, and he understands that some players may be more comfortable composing and practicing their cadenzas ahead of time.¹⁰⁷ In leaving the generation of the cadenzas open, O'Connor invited other soloists to add their personal touches to the *Fiddle Concerto*.

¹⁰⁵ Mark O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto*, (Bonsall, CA: Mark O'Connor Musik International, 1993), 65-137.

¹⁰⁶ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE FIDDLE CONCERTO: MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Movement I Themes and Formal Construction

Since the days of Vivaldi's violin concerti with ritornello structuring, one of the strongest traditions in the construction of a classical concerto first movement is the presentation of important themes first by the orchestra, before the soloist enters.¹⁰⁸ It wasn't until the middle part of the nineteenth century that progressive composers experimented with formal construction, such as abandoning the double exposition in favor of having the soloist enter at the beginning to state the primary themes. Following the early example set by Baroque and Classical-era composers in the opening movement of his *Fiddle Concerto*, O'Connor created a lengthy expositional section for the orchestra before the entrance of the soloist. The movement has two thematic ideas: a hoedown section in 2/4 meter and a waltz in 6/8 or sometimes 6/4. According to O'Connor, he conceived of the relationship between these two themes as:

A dialogue between “fiddler” and “violinists” of the orchestra. The musical impression of the 1st movement is that the waltz introduced by the orchestral musicians in the exposition, is eventually turned into a hoedown by the solo “fiddler” later in the movement with everyone finding the same page to land on by the 2nd movement.¹⁰⁹

O'Connor's hoedown theme contains two complimentary melodies: Hoedown 1 (H1), and Hoedown 2 (H2). H1 is characterized by two sixteenth notes and two eighth note pickups that leap upwards by a fourth, fifth, and finally a sixth (Figure 4.1).

¹⁰⁸ Hutchings, et al.

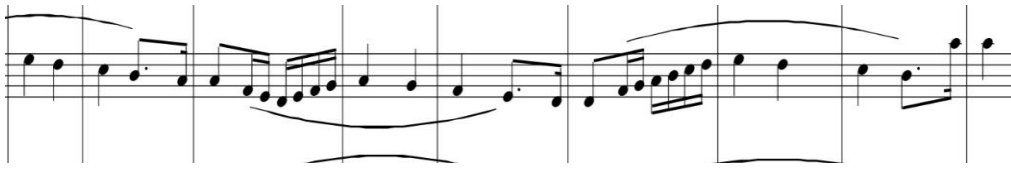
¹⁰⁹ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

Figure 4.1: Hoedown 1. Violin I, measures 1-9, from *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, Bonsall, CA: Mark O'Connor Musik International, 1999, by Mark O'Connor, 1.



Using contrary motion, H2 compliments the upward-leaping H1 with five legato descending notes (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Hoedown 2. Oboe I, measures 42-50, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 4.



O'Connor's waltz theme is also constructed with two contrasting components: W1 (Figure 4.3) and W2 (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.3: Waltz 1. Flute I, measures 91-94, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 9.



W2 begins with three descending notes often ornamented with a downward leap of a sixth between them (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Waltz 2. Oboe I, measures 99-105, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 10.



Regarding the waltz theme in the first movement, O'Connor said:

My treatment of a waltz for this composition could have gone essentially one of two directions. I remembered contemplating something very lively, perhaps a typical dance-like Canadian or Mexican waltz, or a very slow and moody music in 3/4, such as my soon-to-be written Appalachia Waltz. I decided to employ the fast waltz tempo within the 1st movement's structure as a counter theme to the hoedown subject.¹¹⁰

The melody at the beginning of the coda is rhythmically contrasted to the H1 theme, with three eighth notes followed by two sixteenth note pickups to the next measure (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Coda Melody. Solo Violin, measures 575-581, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 65-66.



The following table gives an overview of the way O'Connor presented and developed each of these themes in Movement I (Table 4.1).

¹¹⁰ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

Table 4.1: Fiddle Concerto Movement I Formal Construction

Orchestra Hoedown	1	Tutti H1	D Major
	9	Tutti H2: repeated twice, then embellished with sixteenth notes filling out the steps between the notes.	Cadence on V
	18	H1	
	22	Motivic development	
	41	H2 Woodwind solos, slower tempo	
	53	Motivic development, original tempo	Cadence on dominant to B Minor
Orchestra Waltz	90	W1	B Minor
	99	W2	
Transition	108	H1 Transitional material	D Major, cadence on V
Solo Hoedown	132	H1	
	140	H2	
	153	H3 (New material): a repeating pattern of triads that outline a harmonic progression.	
	163	H3 Embellishment: Solo flourish with sixteenth notes, then sextuplets, then thirty-seconds. Climbs to upper fingerboard, reaching A6 in m. 192.	
Tutti-Solo Dialogue	197	Tutti H1 Transitional material	
	208	Solo H2 Embellishment	
	245	Solo H1 Transitional material	Cadence on V
	253	Solo H2	
	265	Solo H1 Motivic development, fermata	

Table 4.1: Fiddle Concerto Movement I Formal Construction

"Common Ground"	309	Solo rubato flourish, fermata	
	310	Solo motivic development	
	328	Tutti H1, H2, H1	E Major
	362	H1 Motivic development	
	386	Solo W1, W2	B Minor
	404	Tutti W1, W2	
	420	Tutti W3 (New material): a transitional idea that elongates the waltz. Provides a high point: G#6 H1	
	431	Solo W2, H1 Embellishment, Flourish, W3, W1, fermata	Transition back to D Major
	492	H1 Motivic development, W1, W2	
	574	Solo Cadenza	
Coda	575	Solo closing material, Tutti closing material, Tutti H1 increasing in intensity to end	

Movement I Solo Techniques and Style

O'Connor composed the first movement solo violin part using several techniques drawn from Texas-style fiddling. First, frequent accents on weak beats add rhythmic interest to steady sixteenth-note patterns. For example, in measures 229-232, the written accents create a hemiola that give the repetitive line rhythmic drive. The bowing in this

excerpt further disguises the measure delineations and augments the effect of the accents (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Movement I Solo Figuration with Hemiola. Solo Violin, measures 229-230, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 24.



Classical violin soloists work to avoid accenting string crossings, but fiddle players embrace accents on weak beats and string crossings.

Another fiddle styling O'Connor incorporated into the solo line is the use of open strings. O'Connor marked open string indications throughout the solo violin part to instruct the soloist to utilize open strings more often than fingering the same notes. The result is two-fold: the open strings give the solo line more brightness than fingered notes, and the inadvertent accent that occurs especially when bowing an open E string gives the solo line more rhythmic energy.¹¹¹ An additional element that mirrors Texas-style hoedown fiddling is the frequent reminder in the solo hoedown passages to play strictly in tempo without rubato. O'Connor's choice of marking instructs the soloist to avoid the musical rubato that a player may add to a Romantic Era concerto. For example, in the initial entrance of the solo violin and subsequent embellishments of the hoedown themes, the solo line is marked specifically where to press forward or hold back at certain cadences, but otherwise the soloist is to play in tempo. These three techniques--hemiola accents, open strings, and solid rhythm give the solo violin part the forward drive that

¹¹¹ Amanda Smith Roberts, "Mark O'Connor's Caprices for Unaccompanied Violin: Their Inspiration, American Roots, and Techniques Presented" (DMA diss., University of Alabama, 2012), 7, accessed September 20, 2016, <http://acumen.lib.ua.edu/u0015>.

would motivate a crowd dancing a reel, hornpipe, or hoedown accompanied by a fiddler.¹¹²

In the solo line O'Connor also wrote frequent double stops of a fourth, fifth, or sixth (as well as the orchestra string parts). As discussed in the previous chapter, fiddle players rely heavily on these intervals because they are the easiest to play by using an open string, and the double stops fill out the sound and give tension and release to their melodic lines. Some of the drones in O'Connor's solo violin part are actually much more virtuosic as they often are *not* open strings. One example of fingered drones starts in measure 503 and continues through 540 (measures 503-511 reproduced here in Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7: Movement I Solo Part with Double Stops. Solo Violin, measures 503-511, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 59-60.



The effect of the fourths and fifths sounds similar to open-string drones, but the double stops are much more difficult to play in tune.

¹¹² Jabbour.

When the solo fiddle takes over the waltz theme in measure 386, O'Connor wrote frequent grace notes and turns to embellish the melody (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8: Movement I Solo Waltz Embellishment. Solo Violin, measures 386-389, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 42-43.



The intricate sound is something the audience might hear during the waltz portion of a fiddler's contest round, such as Laura Houle's transcription of O'Connor's version of the tune "Yellow Rose Waltz" (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9: "Yellow Rose Waltz" Performed by Mark O'Connor. Measures 34-40, from Houle, "Carrying on the Tradition--A Performance Practice Analysis of Stylistic Evolution in Texas Contest Style Fiddling," 113.



O'Connor drew heavily on fiddle style characteristics in the first movement of the *Fiddle Concerto*, but did not abandon key features from the classical concerto genre. The orchestra and the solo take turns developing motives. As themes return following their initial presentation, the soloist often repeats them with variation, similar to the way Texas-style fiddlers like Eck Robertson, Benny Thomasson, and O'Connor would use thematic variation to give more interest to two-part tunes in their contest rounds.

To successfully plan and perform a cadenza for this movement (as well as movement three), O'Connor says:

My best advice for creating your own cadenzas is to craft them in the same way they would any other big classical violin concerto. That task is to identify the themes of the piece and create some interesting passage work from those themes. Cadenzas are supposed to be energetic and flashy for the soloist. It is the violinist's time to be an arranger – or improviser!¹¹³

By advising players to construct cadenzas based on the themes of the movement, O'Connor keeps his composition rooted in the classical music tradition, but in encouraging impromptu cadenzas he allows for the piece to take on the “controlled improvisation” nature of Texas-style fiddling.

Movement I Orchestral Part

From the orchestra's first presentation of the hoedown theme, there are several audible elements taken from American fiddling in the orchestral part for Movement I. Similar to the solo violin part, the strings sections are directed to use open strings. In classical pieces, orchestral string players avoid open strings in order to maintain uniform color and rich sound during a passage and throughout the section of players. The score also marks the string sections non-vibrato in many places, beginning in the first measures.¹¹⁴ Typically, modern orchestral players rely on vibrato to achieve blended,

¹¹³ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹¹⁴ O'Connor, 1.

sustained section sound and only play sections non-vibrato at the request of a composer, conductor, or section leader trying to create a very specific sound.¹¹⁵

Regarding his treatment of fiddling stylings in the orchestral string sections, O'Connor said:

In order for The Fiddle Concerto to be performed perfectly to my satisfaction, I provide all of the bowings for the strings throughout the piece. There is no similarity between bowings and articulation for Mozart's music and for American string playing. What I wished to avoid was to have The Fiddle Concerto be interpreted with Mozart-style bowings and articulation left to section leaders in the orchestra. This would be unsuccessful.¹¹⁶

The first example of this issue O'Connor addressed above regarding string articulations comes in measure 63. The string sections, with the exception of the second violins, are instructed to play sixteenth notes "on the string."¹¹⁷ The second violins are instructed to play "off the string." *Spiccato* bow stroke is a difficult technique that violinists study in preparation for playing classical repertoire. In musical notation, a section of steady sixteenth notes with staccato dots, like in measures 63-71 of the second violin part for the *Fiddle Concerto*, indicates the section should be played either *spiccato* (at slower tempos) or *sautillé* (at faster tempos).¹¹⁸ In Texas-style fiddling, the bow rarely leaves the string. There are very few rests, and fiddlers work to change bow directions as smoothly

¹¹⁵ David Hurwitz, "Orchestral Vibrato, Part I; Historical Context and the Evidence on the Printed Page," *Classics Today*, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://www.classicstoday.com/features/ClassicsToday-Vibrato-part1.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹¹⁷ O'Connor, 6-7.

¹¹⁸ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2013), 75-78.

as possible.¹¹⁹ *Spiccato* and *sautillé* strokes are simply not used, so for clarity O'Connor deliberately indicated for the string sections in his *Fiddle Concerto* to play on the string. For well-trained orchestra string players, seeing a similar string of sixteenth notes in a Mozart concerto would result in the section players using *spiccato* to keep their accompaniment motor rhythms light transparent. The effect in this passage of the rest of the strings playing on the string while the second violins play off the string is the smooth, sustained sound of Texas-style fiddling but with some articulation and lightness to the combined string sound.¹²⁰

Outside the string sections, the woodwinds are the next instrument family whose parts are most closely modeled after fiddling style. O'Connor says the woodwinds sometimes "embody the stylistic direction of [the] strings and sometimes play a close double to them in tutti sections. The winds required some additional articulation and phrase markings."¹²¹ The principal flute is the first instrument to play the beautiful waltz melody in movement one. After one and a half measures the second violins play a harmony line a third below the flute line, before the first violins take over the melody. For a few beats the violins and flute are like two twin fiddlers playing in tight, parallel harmony.

In an email to the author for this document, O'Connor wrote that "Regarding the brass and percussion writing, my approach was to be idiomatic to brass and percussion

¹¹⁹ Phillips, *Contest Fiddling*, 7.

¹²⁰ Mark O'Connor, "The Fiddle Concerto," Mark O'Connor and the Concordia orchestra, conducted by Marin Alsop, recorded 1994, Warner Brothers, CD.

¹²¹ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

composing in general and it did not need an American string interpretation or reference point for the articulation."¹²² The role the brass sections most often play in the first movement of O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* is to provide fanfares. For example, in measures 66-71 the horns, trumpets, and trombones trade off overlapping fanfare figures. The rhythm they play, an eighth note connected to sixteenth notes and then two more eighths, sounds like a classical brass fanfare. However, this motive is also the opening rhythm of O'Connor's H1 theme in this first movement. In this way the fiddle motive and the brass fanfares tie fiddle music and symphonic music together; an example of the cross-pollination of styles O'Connor was able to create with this piece.

In addition to the string, woodwind, and brass parts in the first movement of the *Fiddle Concerto*, the harp plays a role in helping the orchestra achieve a fiddle-style sound. O'Connor relied heavily on the harp for accompaniment during the waltz sections of the first movement.¹²³ The harp provides the familiar pattern of a bass note on beat one, and lighter chords on beats two and three that characterizes the iconic waltzes of Johann Strauss. In Texas-style fiddling, this role is filled by a guitar player, so in the orchestral setting O'Connor turned to the orchestral strummed instrument--the harp.

Movement I Harmonic Language

The first movement of O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* is in D major, as is the third movement. D major is a comfortable key for violinists and fiddlers as it allows for the use

¹²² O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹²³ O'Connor, 9-10.

of open string notes that are within the tonic and dominant chords. O'Connor's hoedown theme reinforces the key every time it begins with the pick-up As acting as scale degree five leading to the tonic D, as in the pick-ups to measure one.¹²⁴

The first movement waltz melody is in the relative minor of the home key; B minor.¹²⁵ These key relationships reflect a common practice found in classical concerti; the second major theme of the movement is first presented in a contrasting key area to the first, most often the relative minor or the dominant.¹²⁶ Relative keys relationships also show up occasionally in contest-style fiddling, where a tune moves to the relative minor key for a verse or section, either through modulation or a simple switch at the end of a section. For example, see O'Connor's version of the tune "I Don't Love Nobody" from his 1980 round at the National Oldtime Fiddlers Contest, as transcribed by Stacy Phillips in "Mark O'Connor; The Championship Years." The tune starts in C major, and moves to A minor for a middle section before returning to C major for the remainder.¹²⁷ The practice of modulating between major and relative minor keys, found in both fiddle music and classical compositions, reflects the two styles' common roots in Western tonality.

One other notable key change in the first movement of the *Fiddle Concerto* comes in measure 328 with a modulation up one whole step to E major.¹²⁸ Transposing a melody up one step is more common in fiddle music than classical, where it's more typical to

¹²⁴ O'Connor, 1.

¹²⁵ O'Connor, 8.

¹²⁶ Hutchings, et al.

¹²⁷ Phillips, *Mark O'Connor--The Championship Years*, 130-133.

¹²⁸ O'Connor, 37.

modulate to the dominant, subdominant, or relative minor key rather than up a step for dramatic emphasis. Modulating up one step is common in church hymn-singing and other vocally-centered music types, as modulating across the circle of fifths is not always feasible for vocal ranges. Just as instrumental concerti can be traced back to the Italian *bel canto* tradition, fiddle music shares a past with its predecessors in folk vocal airs and hymn tunes, and O'Connor combined both traditions in his *Fiddle Concerto*.¹²⁹

Movement II Themes and Formal Construction

The first melody in movement two is a stately falling line of quarter notes and eighth notes in two measures of 4/4 time, followed by two measures of 5/4 time (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10 Movement II Solo Melody 1. Solo Violin, measures 1-4, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 77.



The plodding rhythmic figure gives way to the gently-lilting 6/8 feel of melody 2, with gentle downward leaps of a fifth followed by descending stepwise motion (Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11: Movement II Solo Melody 2. Solo Violin, measures 7-14, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 78.



¹²⁹ Goertzen.

Hearing both these melodies it is possible to imagine the dance O'Connor described in his notes on this movement.¹³⁰

At the end of the second movement O'Connor uses an effective classical compositional technique to tie the first and second movements together: A five-note motive from the first movement's Hoedown 1 theme is cyclically brought back in a transitional coda. This turning point is marked by the return of the Hoedown 1 motive from the first movement; two 32nd note As followed by an upward leap of a fourth to D and then E. Here the Hoedown 1 motive is less a driving rhythm but instead brings to mind a horn call from afar. The solo violin's final statement of Melody 1, in D major, leaves the motive fresh in our ears and makes for a pleasing transition when the motive is transformed into a jig at the opening of movement three. Table 4.2 outlines O'Connor's construction of Movement II.

Table 4.2 Movement II Formal Construction

Solo with Strings	1	Melody 1 in 4/4, then 5/4	D Minor
	7	Melody 2 in 6/8	
	15	Melody 1	
Solo	27	Embellished Melody 1, in 6/8	
Interlude	35	6/8, then 7/8, non-thematic	
Solo	40	Melody 2, in 3/8	
	56	Melody 2, chromatic development	
Solo and Tutti	74	Melody 1	
	82	Melody 2	
Interlude	90	6/8, then 7/8, thicker accompaniment than first interlude	

¹³⁰ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

Table 4.2 Movement II Formal Construction

Solo Waltz	95	3/8, marked "Longingly," sparse accompaniment by woodwinds, then pizzicato strings	
Tutti Waltz	141	3/8, New material	A Minor
Solo and Tutti	157	Melody 2, Building intensity, chromatic, gradually adding instruments	Transition back to D Minor
Solo	189	Free rubato, strings tremolo, harp	
Transition to Mvt. III	207	Hoedown 1 motives from Mvt. I returns as "horn call" from afar, first in solo violin, then woodwinds, then other instruments overlapping	Transition to D Major
	248	Solo Melody 1 with F-natural raised to F-sharp, motive to be transformed to Mvt. III Jig melody	D Major

Movement II Solo Techniques and Style

O'Connor composed the solo violin part for movement two with the same stylistic techniques he used in movement one, especially heavy embellishments. The slower tempo of this middle movement allows more room for complex combinations of grace notes, turns, and mordants. Take, for example, measures 27-30 of the solo violin part (Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: Movement II Solo Embellishment. Solo Violin, measures 27-20, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 80-81 (excerpt in treble clef).



O'Connor wrote open string grace notes that give the effect of a rolled double stop, mordents, and 32nd-note passing tones all within a short period. Organizing the left hand to accommodate these complex embellishments will take practice for any player wishing to perform O'Connor's piece. Another adaptation of fiddle music to the concerto realm is O'Connor's treatment of rhythm in movement two. Whereas in movement one the hoedown theme continued moving forward without rubato, O'Connor's movement two contains detailed notation of measures that are intended to sound improvisational. One example of this idea appears in measures 38-39 of the second movement (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13 Movement II Composed Rubato in Solo Part. Solo Violin, measures 38-39, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 82 (excerpt in treble clef).



Measures 38-39 contain a complex combination of dotted rhythms under triplet barring and grace notes. However, in recordings of O'Connor playing the piece this measure sounds like a moment of free embellishment before the piece moves on to the next idea.¹³¹ While this is a small section within the larger piece, it is an example of the way O'Connor endeavored to make the *Fiddle Concerto* accessible for other violinists to perform effectively by notating exactly what he wanted and eliminating the possibility for confusion in interpretation.

¹³¹ O'Connor, recording with Concordia Orchestra and Marin Alsop.

Movement II Orchestral Part

O'Connor used the orchestra in movement two to create striking aural colors. The transparency of the orchestration means individual instruments, especially from the woodwind section, are able to shine through in contrast to the sound of the solo violin. O'Connor says he was emulating the sound of a Baroque piece in this second movement, and there is one section where this is particularly evident. Beginning in measure 27 the solo violin plays a melodic variation of the first theme, this time in 6/8 time. The woodwinds are playing eighth notes with quick trills on each, and the only other section playing is the bass section. A few measures later the other string sections join the woodwinds with the quick trill. The overall sound is strikingly similar to a passage in Vivaldi's "Winter" concerto from the *Four Seasons*. Another interesting passage of orchestral color starts in measure 157, where the tambourine enters on the second and third beats of each measure while the solo violin is playing a somber waltz melody.¹³² Finally, O'Connor wrote tremolo for the strings alongside runs up and down the staff for the harp starting in measure 189, to accompany a rubato section in the solo violin.¹³³ This section sounds dramatic and sets up the following period of prolonged transition to the third movement. Colorful orchestral sounds lend extra character to the second movement and are a testament to O'Connor's remarkable understanding of orchestration and concerto composition.

Movement II Harmonic Language

¹³² O'Connor, 92-94.

¹³³ O'Connor, 94-96.

O'Connor followed a practice very common to classical concerti by composing the middle movement to his concerto in the parallel minor to the outer movements. However, looking at the solo violin part alone in the first few bars may deceive some into believing the movement to be in A minor, as the line centers around A and E. The voice most responsible for reinforcing the home key in the beginning is actually the inside players of the first violin section. Their line centers around D and contains the important C# leading tone.¹³⁴ The openness of the harmony in this opening section, which repeats many times in different textural combinations, helps give the music the sparse, Baroque-sounding quality O'Connor described in his notes on the movement.¹³⁵

The solo line in the second movement features a few moments of chromaticism that give the movement rich harmonic interest. One example of this is measures 48-73, where the solo line takes Melody 2 wandering downward and back upward by a series of half-steps, arriving finally back home with a D minor cadence. The instruments of the orchestra with the darkest color; the low strings, horns, trombones, clarinets and contrabassoon, provide support in this complex harmonic episode.¹³⁶

Movement III Themes and Formal Construction

In O'Connor's words, movement three of the *Fiddle Concerto* "re-imagines the Canadian jig dance that I grew up around in my hometown of Seattle and it sends that

¹³⁴ O'Connor, 77.

¹³⁵ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹³⁶ O'Connor, 83-84.

theme on quite a journey."¹³⁷ The buoyant jig theme is repeated many times by different sections of the orchestra and the solo, beginning prior to the third movement, when the "same small melodic strand is repeated at the end of the 2nd slow movement but in the major key to signal the transposition and transformation to come."¹³⁸ Table 4.3 shows O'Connor's construction of Movement III.

Table 4.3 Movement III Formal Construction

Solo Jig	1	Jig Theme (J) in 6/8	D Major
Tutti/Solo Jig	23	J	
Solo	31	Chromatic J: a version of J that serves as traditional material later in the movement	
Tutti	51	J	
	59	B Melody (New Material)	
	84	C Melody (New Material)	
Solo	97	Chromatic J	
	105	D Melody (New Material)	
	117	C Melody	
	141	J	
Tutti/Solo	162	J	
Solo	170	Chromatic J	
	192	C Melody	
Tutti Strings/Solo	210	C Melody development, 4-5 second fermata	Modulating to F# Minor, driven by descending bass line and chromatic

¹³⁷ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Table 4.3 Movement III Formal Construction

			changes in solo line
Solo Waltz	284	Waltz in 6/4, very slow at first, then accelerating.	F# Minor
Cadenzas	315	Composed cadenza	
	338	Improvised cadenza	
Coda	339	4/4, Canonic Entrances, starting with strings, then solo, then gradually adding more instruments	D Major
	366	3/8, Strings and xylophone in octaves	
Solo Waltz Reprise	384	Solo waltz material reprised, in 6/8, suddenly slower, then accelerating, fermata	F# Minor
	411	Solo waltz reprised in 6/4, fermata	
Jig Reprise	423	Solo C Melody, adding strings	D Major
	447	Solo Chromatic J	
	467	Tutti C Melody, Tutti J	
	482	Solo J, B Melody, J	
	503	Tutti B Melody, increasing in volume and intensity	
	518	Tutti J	
	526	Solo Chromatic J, adding tutti instruments for crescendo over 5 bars of 9/8	
	547	Closing chords	

The opening of O'Connor's third movement is similar to the third movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, which O'Connor listened to and studied when preparing to compose and orchestrate his own concerto. Beethoven composed a 6/8 jig melody for the

solo violin over simple accompaniment, followed by a full tutti repeat of the theme.¹³⁹

O'Connor also opened his third movement with a statement of a jig theme in the solo violin, before giving it to the tutti orchestra.¹⁴⁰

O'Connor crafted his main Jig Theme ("J") by re-structuring Melody 1 from the second movement. For thematic discussion in this portion of the chapter the opening melody from movement two will be called "2." Just as Melody 2 had two repeated A notes followed by a descending pattern, so does the J Theme feature two repeated As followed, in this case, by a descending arpeggio. Melody 2 and the J Theme are related on a larger scale as well: The repeated A notes in the movement two melody correlate to the first full measure of the J Theme with its D arpeggio. Melody 2 then drops to G, and the J Theme similarly follows this shape, with the descending G arpeggio. Finally, the last four notes in Melody 2, G-F-natural-E-A, are also in the third and fourth measures of the J melody.¹⁴¹ The haunting loneliness of the slow movement is transformed into a bright, upbeat theme with the addition of the F-sharp and the jaunty 6/8 jig rhythm (Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14: Movement III Jig Melody. Solo Violin, measures 1-9, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 102.



¹³⁹ Beethoven, 42.

¹⁴⁰ O'Connor, 102-104.

¹⁴¹ O'Connor, 102.

The second important melody in movement three, "B," descends stepwise from A, with an open-A drone accompaniment in the violins. The stepwise motion is a nice contrast to the multiple leaps in the J Theme. One other aspect of the B Melody is worth noting: beginning with the second statement in measure 66, O'Connor marked an accent on both the first and third eighth-note subdivisions of the measure, subtlety suggesting a three-quarter-note subdivision of the measure rather than two groupings of three eighth notes.¹⁴² This becomes more explicit in measures 77 and 81-83, where strict quarter notes break up the lilting flow of the jig with a punchy hemiola.¹⁴³

The third important melody in this movement, (C), offsets the dominance of descending motion in the J and B Melodies with a rising third in each consecutive measure, and finally rising a fourth to complete the terraced triad. This arrival on A is a thrilling high point in the phrase. O'Connor also used the C Melody as a tool for harmonic motion throughout the movement. For example, beginning in measure 204, the C Melody remains steady in the solo violin part while gradually other notes are introduced to create harmonic tension and release.¹⁴⁴

The J Theme from movement three of the *Fiddle Concerto* is a melody that O'Connor used in other works. O'Connor arranged the theme for violin and cello duo, which can be heard on his *Appalachia Waltz* album featuring cellist Yo Yo Ma. He also arranged the tune for violin and viola, and for two violins.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² O'Connor, 108.

¹⁴³ O'Connor, 109.

¹⁴⁴ O'Connor, 121-126.

Movement III Musical Techniques

The articulation of the main J Theme heard at the beginning of the movement is marked consistently through the movement with an accent on the second note of the measure. After the initial slurred pickup notes to measure one, the quarter note plus four eighth notes rhythm in the following measures is slurred to connect beats one and two. The aural effect of this bow grouping is a slight accent on the second note of the measure and a blurring of the emphasis on two dotted-quarter note beats in the measure, or a triple subdivision into three quarter notes. The hemiola effect gets extra emphasis beginning with the accompanying figure in measure ten of the trombone parts, a quarter note and an accented eighth note tied to a held note. The effect continues into other sections of the orchestra beginning with the horns in measure fifteen.¹⁴⁶

A more classical string section interpretation of the J Theme would be to hook together all of beat one in a single down bow to avoid an accent of the second note of the measure. O'Connor bowed the Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Bass parts like this when the string section is accompanying the solo violin on the second statement of the melody (Figure 4.15).

¹⁴⁵ "Downloadable Sheet Music" Mark O'Connor, accessed October 9, 2016, <http://www.sitemason.com/site/kYJA0U>.

¹⁴⁶ O'Connor, 102-103.

Figure 4.15: Movement III String Section Bowings. Violin II, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, measures 23-30, from O'Connor, *The Fiddle Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 104.

The musical score displays four staves: Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. Each staff contains eight measures of music. The Violin II staff is in treble clef, while the other three are in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a series of bowings (V) and accents (f) across the measures. The Violin II part is in treble clef, and the other three parts are in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a series of bowings (V) and accents (f) across the measures.

The classically-trained players in these sections are likely more comfortable with this bow grouping. Only the first violin section matches the violin solo part in unison with the fiddle bowing. Throughout the *Fiddle Concerto*, accents are an important element that differs from classical to fiddle playing and O'Connor's use of accents in the piece are one way he was able to effectively orchestrate the parts so the finished product sounds like Texas-fiddling style.

Another stylistic effect O'Connor used in the last movement of the *Fiddle Concerto* solo part is something I will call "clustering." The first example is a variation on the Chromatic A theme, beginning in measure 97.¹⁴⁷ Instead of the simple arpeggios that make up the original theme, the solo violin extends the arpeggios by a few notes to create a 5-note descending pattern. Squeezing a few extra notes into the same amount of time heightens the excitement of the section, and the uneven groupings of five notes

¹⁴⁷ O'Connor, 111.

rather than four or six creates extra rhythmic tension. The cluster runs beginning in measure 97 are slurred together, but another example of this technique comes later in the movement and is bowed separately. In measures 472 and 478-80 O'Connor composed clusters of four, five, and six notes barred together to ornament the solo line.¹⁴⁸ This was a technique from O'Connor's contest style that was emulated by other players as contest fiddling got more and more virtuosic and moved away from dance fiddling style. O'Connor would break from the even runs of eighth notes for a few cluster runs with extra notes. This effect served to interrupt the smooth, long lines of running notes momentarily by the jaggedness the fast detaché bows and uneven note groupings created.

In addition to marking time for an improvised cadenza in the third movement of the *Fiddle Concerto*, beginning after measure 337, O'Connor composed a cadenza for the solo violin beginning in measure 315.¹⁴⁹ The section is entirely 16th notes, mostly repeating arpeggio patterns with gradually changing notes. O'Connor plays this passage extremely fast in his own performances of the Concerto, and the aural effect is brilliantly virtuosic. However, the line actually relies heavily on open strings, making it very idiomatic. The end of the section, measures 329-337, is one of the most virtuosic moments in the piece for the solo violin. The overall contour of the line is an ascending scale up to the high A, a high point for the whole piece. The upwards motion is ornamented with a repeated note pattern that keeps the ascending motion in the listener's ear while requiring the solo violinist to jump all over the fingerboard very quickly. The section culminates with the highest note in the whole piece, the F7 in measure 335,

¹⁴⁸ O'Connor, 153-154.

¹⁴⁹ O'Connor, 133-137.

reached by a one-octave shift from below. O'Connor marked in the solo part to slide into the note. This level of virtuosity is not something an average fiddler would be able to play, but the difficulty helps give O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* musical substance.

CHAPTER 5

INTERTEXTUALITY

Premiere and reception of the *Fiddle Concerto*

The Santa Fe Symphony premiered the *Fiddle Concerto* with O'Connor as soloist in September of 1993. O'Connor recorded the piece a few years later with the Concordia Orchestra and Marin Alsop conducting. O'Connor's early performances of the piece were well-received and positively reviewed. After a performance with the Tucson Symphony, Daniel Buckley of the *Tucson Citizen* called O'Connor "as remarkable a composer as he is a performer."¹⁵⁰ O'Connor published the piece in 1998, and the score and parts are currently available to purchase and download through O'Connor's own music publishing website.

American String playing

Since the premiere, O'Connor has performed the *Fiddle Concerto* over 250 times with orchestras across the United States. O'Connor hopes to see more violinists performing the piece, as well as more orchestras programming contemporary concertos and repertoire that represents what he calls "American string playing." According to O'Connor:

As people wish more and more to excel in American Classical music, they will want to know what makes music American. When looking for those

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Buckley, "Fiddler O'Connor Plays With Astonishing Virtuosity," *Tucson Citizen*, February 3, 1996, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://tucsoncitizen.com/morgue2/1996/02/03/183905-fiddler-o-connor-plays-with-astonishing-virtuosity/>.

answers, a wealth of information including literature, musical styles, performance environments, creativity and cultural diversity, is revealed. I am even compelled to say that the American musical track is every bit as rich for the 21st century string student as the European Classical music of old.¹⁵¹

O'Connor believes this fact is essential to the health of classical music in America in the twenty-first century as performers and orchestras continue to explore ways to reach new audiences and maintain vitality.¹⁵²

The O'Connor Method

Out of a desire to contribute to the contemporary pedagogical repertoire, O'Connor designed *The O'Connor Method* for teaching his form of American string playing to young musicians. The series includes methods books for violin, viola, cello, double bass, and string orchestra students, and progresses learners from first approach to the instrument through an advanced playing level.¹⁵³ O'Connor also conduct a string camp each summer in New York City. Faculty at the O'Connor method camp teach O'Connor's brand of "American music, creativity, cultural diversity, and improvisation to improve learning for both children and adults who want to take string lessons while enjoying and excelling at music."¹⁵⁴ The camp features group lessons, string orchestra,

¹⁵¹ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

and an opportunity to learn tune-writing, dancing, and singing.¹⁵⁵ As a pedagogue, O'Connor uses the string camp as a "laboratory to test out theories, teaching philosophies and literature to create a better string player in the music landscape of our time and in our future."¹⁵⁶ The O'Connor Method summer camp is an extension of the American String Playing movement O'Connor began with the *Fiddle Concerto*.

Selected O'Connor Compositions Since the *Fiddle Concerto*

The *Fiddle Concerto* was one of the first in a now-long list of successful works O'Connor composed for the classical realm. During the time he was working on the *Fiddle Concerto* he was also engaged in composing *Caprices for Unaccompanied Violin Nos. 1-6*. Inspired by the *Caprices* composed for solo violin by Pieter Locatelli (1695-1764) and Nicolo Paganini, O'Connor composed his own set of *Caprices* between 1986 and 1994. The pieces are among O'Connor's most critically acclaimed works; they are technically demanding enough to be studied by advanced violinists, but are at the same time accessible and enjoyable for audiences. The techniques presented include "complex rhythms, broken chord arpeggios, two handed pizzicato, spiccato, and double-stopped runs," presented in the context of fiddle styling and rhythm.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ "Official O'Connor Method Camps," The O'Connor Method Official Website, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.oconnormethod.com/Camps.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

¹⁵⁷ Mark O'Connor, "Caprices No. 1-6," Mark O'Connor Downloadable Sheet Music, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.sitemason.com/site/kGwSPe/caprices.1-6.html>.

Some of O'Connor's other pieces for the symphonic stage include *Three Pieces for Violin and Large Orchestra*, which was premiered with the Nashville Symphony during the 1996 celebrations of the Tennessee bicentennial. The pieces, "Call of the Mockingbird," "Trail of Tears," and "Fanfare for the Volunteer" were released in 1999 on a CD titled *Fanfare for the Volunteer*.¹⁵⁸ O'Connor wrote *American Seasons (Seasons of an American Life)*, a concerto for violin and chamber orchestra, in 1999. According to the composer, the music "celebrates the various stages of an American life at the wakening of the twenty-first century." The piece is composed of four movements representing a long-standing musical theme employed by Robert Schumann, Richard Strauss, and others: the stages of life. O'Connor's opus includes birth, adolescence, maturity and old age.¹⁵⁹

Building on the success of the *Fiddle Concerto*, O'Connor composed his *Double Violin Concerto for Two Violins and Orchestra* in 1997. The piece was premiered with American violinist Nadja Solerno-Sonnenberg (b. 1961) and O'Connor, and recorded with Marin Alsop and the Colorado Symphony Orchestra. O'Connor's *Double Concerto (For the Heroes) For Cello, Violin and Orchestra* was completed in 2001, inspired by the resilience of a group of young music students who refused to cancel a performance tour with O'Connor despite the recent 9/11 terrorist attacks. O'Connor explained that "During those times when some people thought the world was falling apart around them, it was the celebration of the enduring human spirit that ended up influencing me the most

¹⁵⁸ Mark O'Connor, "Three Pieces for Violin and Orchestra," Mark O'Connor Downloadable Sheet Music, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://www.sitemason.com/site/kGwSPe/three.pieces.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Mark O'Connor "American Seasons," Mark O'Connor Downloadable Sheet Music, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.sitemason.com/site/kGwSPe/american.seasons.html>.

profoundly."¹⁶⁰ O'Connor's next work for the same force was his *Concerto No. 6 (Old Brass)*, composed in 2003 for violin and orchestra. The composer recorded this concerto alongside his 2006 *Americana Symphony: Variations on Appalachia Waltz*, a five-movement work for orchestra. O'Connor's work on symphonic pieces continued with *March of the Gypsy Fiddler*, a triple concerto for piano, violin, cello, and orchestra premiered and recording by the Ahn Trio in 2010. The work is based on three tunes O'Connor previously composed for other projects. He interwove them and orchestrated the melodies for the triple concerto.¹⁶¹ All of these pieces for various soloists and orchestra are a continuation of O'Connor's work, started with the *Fiddle Concerto*, to combine classical music forms with American fiddle elements to create a new style that appeals to a wide audience of music lovers.

O'Connor's most recent project in symphonic composition is the 2011 *Improvised Violin Concerto*, which features a through-composed orchestral score and completely improvised solo violin part. The orchestra presents and develops themes as structural pillars, which "afford the violin the ultimate freedom to experiment with and respond to the themes and other musical materials."¹⁶² To aid in preparation for a performance, the sheet music for the violin part contains chord symbols and logistical instructions like time signatures, measure numbers, rehearsal letters, tempo markings, and "descriptions of

¹⁶⁰ John Pitcher, "Fancy Fiddle," *Nashville Scene*, March 1, 2007, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.nashvillescene.com/music/article/13014430/fancy-fiddle>.

¹⁶¹ Mark O'Connor, "Triple Concerto; March of the Gypsy Fiddler," recorded 2011 with the Ahn Trio and New Jersey Youth Symphony conducted by Jeffrey Grogan, accessed October 12, 2016, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=F622UineRjs>.

¹⁶² Mark O'Connor, "The Improvised Violin Concerto Program Notes," 2011, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.markoconnor.com/with-orchestras>.

individual sections (like 'Impending inferno' and 'Evaporation') that inform the soloist's ideas and mood."¹⁶³ Performing this piece is a daunting prospect to violinists with limited experience with improvisation. However, O'Connor hopes that with the growing influence of his American string playing method and the increasing cross-pollination of musical styles in the American music community more and more violinists will be comfortable programming and presenting pieces like the *Improvised Violin Concerto*.

Other Intertextual Works

Mark O'Connor's vision for the future of American classical music is finding footing as other artists gain popularity from intertextual music that fuses more than one style. In the past twenty years, a growing number of pieces from non-traditional composers have been commissioned by American orchestras. In 2008 the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Oregon Symphony, Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Winston-Salem Symphony, Delaware Symphony Orchestra and Portland Symphony Orchestra co-commissioned a mandolin concerto from mandolinist Chris Thile (b. 1981). Thile rose to fame with the progressive bluegrass group Nickel Creek in the 1990s and early 2000s, and went on to other solo projects and collaboration with bassist Edgar Meyer, including forming the bluegrass-classical fusion band Punch Brothers. Thile's concerto, *Ad asta per alas porci (To the Stars on the Wings of a Pig)*, was premiered in September 2009 featuring Thile with the Colorado Symphony conducted by Jeffrey Kahane. Denver Post

¹⁶³ Mark O'Connor, "The Improvised Violin Concerto Program Notes," 2011, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.markoconnor.com/with-orchestras>.

reviewer Kyle Macmillan described the piece as "A tightly wound, introspective work suffused with a melancholic, even gently haunting feeling. The sometimes spare, sometimes layered piece stays well within the bounds of tonality, looking back at times to Bela Bartok and the early 20th century."¹⁶⁴ Thile and O'Connor share a background as players who started out as American country musicians. However, Thile took a different approach to composing a concerto for his instrument. According to Elizabeth Swartz, program annotator for the Oregon Symphony, Thile's three-movement work is primarily an exploration of "the collaborative and [timbral] possibilities of the orchestra."¹⁶⁵ Thile's mandolin concerto and O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* each successfully combine the traditional concerto medium with a new type of soloist such as a fiddler and a mandolinist.

Thile's concerto received its West Coast premiere in 2009 on an Oregon Symphony concert alongside another intertextual concerto, originally commissioned by the Nashville Symphony and acoustical consulting firm Akustiks, LLC. The piece was jointly composed by banjo player Béla Fleck (b. 1958), tabla player Zakir Hussain (b. 1951), and bassist Edgar Meyer, and those three musicians also premiered the piece. The *Triple Concerto for Banjo, Tabla and Double Bass with Orchestra* bluegrass stylings and the "spiraling, improvised nature of Indian music" with a traditional orchestral backdrop.¹⁶⁶ Fleck, Hussein, and Meyer's concerto takes the idea of intertextual music

¹⁶⁴ Kyle MacMillan, "Mandolin Concerto is a Classic," *Denver Post*, September 17, 2009, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.denverpost.com/2009/09/17/mandolin-concerto-is-a-classic/>.

¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth Swartz, "Bela, Edgar and Friends," Oregon Symphony Program Notes, September 26, 2009, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.orsymphony.org/concerts/0910/programnotes/sp2.aspx>.

¹⁶⁶ Swartz.

one step further by fusing three seemingly different musical styles together in a single work.

In addition to the triple concerto with Hussain and Meyer, Béla Fleck contributed his own solo concerto to the contemporary orchestral repertoire: a banjo concerto premiered in 2011 with the Nashville Symphony. Fleck dedicated the work, *The Imposter*, to bluegrass banjo player Earl Scruggs (1924-2012). According to Fleck, the title and names of the movements, "Infiltration," "Integration," and "Truth Revealed," refer to the composer's feeling of being an outsider who does not belong on a classical music program. Fleck describes the piece as a hero's journey, starring the banjo as the protagonist. The instrument is "trying to avoid the truth of who he is, but in the end cannot avoid it," as the piece evolves from a more classical sound in the beginning but finds comfort in returning to the banjo's bluegrass roots in the end.¹⁶⁷ The concertos composed by Fleck, Hussain, Meyer, Thile, and O'Connor share a common thread; each composer endeavored to create a new sound using instruments that had not previously been considered traditional partners: the banjo, the tabla, the solo bass, the mandolin, the fiddle, and the symphony orchestra. As O'Connor described it, they were creating "musical bridges . . . new ways to connect musical ideas in order to make a third thing happen."¹⁶⁸

In the spirit of building musical bridges, cellist Yo Yo Ma (b. 1955) has forged a groundbreaking intertextual project of his own that goes beyond the concerto format.

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth Swartz, "Bela Fleck and the Oregon Symphony," Oregon Symphony program notes, September 13, 2014, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.orsymphony.org/concerts/1415/programnotes/sc3.aspx>.

¹⁶⁸ O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

Ma's Silk Roads Project, begun in 1998, brings together the traditional folk music of over twenty countries in Asia, Europe, and the Americas in a complex cross-pollination of cultures. According to the organization's mission statement, the Silk Roads Ensemble:

Models new forms of cultural exchange through performances, workshops, and residencies. The artists of the Ensemble draw on the rich tapestry of traditions from around the world that make up our many-layered contemporary identities, weaving together the foreign and familiar to create a new musical language.¹⁶⁹

The Silk Road Ensemble has performed to critical acclaim around the globe and has recorded six albums. In addition to performances, the group focuses on providing learning programs through educational residencies, as well as supporting cultural entrepreneurs in an effort to help arts organizations "achieve sustainability" and "deepen their impact" on communities.¹⁷⁰ Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* and Yo Yo Ma's Silk Roads Ensemble were both projects born from a common goal; O'Connor's desire is to create a new genre of music that appeals to classical music and American fiddle music audiences, and Ma's group uses music to facilitate interactions between different cultures.

¹⁶⁹ "About Us," SilkRoad, accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.silkroadproject.org/about-us>.

¹⁷⁰ "Cultural Entrepreneurship," SilkRoad, accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.silkroadproject.org/studies/cultural-entrepreneurship>.

CONCLUSION

The violin concerto as a genre evolved since its birth in the Baroque era to reflect the changing tastes of musicians and audiences in the European countries where Western classical music was fostered. Along the way composers have used the violin concerto to serve the changing aesthetic ideals of the Classical and Romantic eras, to showcase the technical and expressive abilities of the violin, and to communicate both national pride and personal thoughts. Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*, a multi-stylistic American work, is one of a new kind of piece that combines the classical concerto format with American fiddling style.

Similar to the rich history of the violin concerto genre, American fiddling, especially contest fiddling, evolved from the desire of competitive fiddlers to show mastery of increasingly more difficult fiddling techniques in their tunes. It was this competitive, virtuosic style that launched Mark O'Connor's career as a championship fiddler and successful country music musician in the 1980s and 90s. When he turned his attention to the composition of a concerto, O'Connor relied on the virtuosic fiddle playing style he had developed through his formative years with Benny Thomasson and Stéphane Grappelli. Already at home in a multi-stylistic environment thanks to Thomasson, Grappelli, and his years touring and recording, classical concerto style was just another musical realm to challenge O'Connor.

Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* launched a successful portion of his career dedicated to compositions that combine his unique musical style with classical realms like the recital hall and the symphonic stage. However, in 2016 O'Connor admitted that

he was not sure of the piece's potential for a warm reception when he was composing, because of his lack of experience with performing concerti. As he put it:

I did not imagine I would ever perform the concerto initially and I didn't think that anybody would want me to anyway. Beyond that, I did not think I had the connections, political or otherwise to be invited as a soloist with orchestra . . . Following a conductor through a 40-minute virtuoso violin journey on the professional stage with a symphony orchestra seemed insurmountable for my position in music at that point.¹⁷¹

Despite his doubts, O'Connor enjoyed a successful premiere and positive critical responses, and he has been frequently asked to perform the *Fiddle Concerto* and his other works for violin and orchestra. Part of the success of the piece can be attributed to O'Connor's effortless playing style and refined technique. However, the *Fiddle Concerto* is also effective because of O'Connor's remarkable ability to compose pieces in a way that makes them accessible for other players. Unlike Thile, Meyer, Fleck, and Hussain, O'Connor's piece can be performed by any violinist, especially owing to his ability to precisely notate his musical intentions. O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto* is a more substantial and lasting contribution to the repertoire than pieces by the other non-traditional composers discussed above because they didn't plan for other musicians to perform their pieces. A successful performance of Thile's, Meyer's, Fleck's, and Hussain's concerti relies chiefly on the brilliance of those players as the soloists.

The *Fiddle Concerto* treats audiences to a substantial, full-length classical concerto—complete with thematic development, dialogue between the soloist and orchestra, brilliant virtuosity, and musical depth—combined with the infectious, toe-

¹⁷¹ Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

tapping drive of Texas-style fiddling and the beauty of fiddle waltzes. The opportunity for personal expression, especially during cadenzas, challenges other performers to present their own interpretation of the piece. Classical players who choose to study and perform the work will have to familiarize themselves with the fiddle stylings that are central to the work, just as contemporary violinists strive to perform historically-informed interpretations of Baroque, Classical, and Romantic style concerti. Serious violin students practice techniques to effectively perform works from all different eras, countries, and traditions, from the lyrical brilliance of a Mozart concerto, to the driving rhythms of a Vivaldi concerto, or the passionate expressiveness of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto. So, too, should violin students study and practice to produce the rhythmic groove and ‘danceability’ of a concerto based on American fiddling. O'Connor has made this easier for players by carefully notating on the page exactly how to achieve the style. In reference to his compositional style, O'Connor remarked:

When I am asked about teaching *The Fiddle Concerto*, I coach players on the concerto in the standard musical ways, such as bringing out both moving lines in polyphonic passages, not forsaking the “groove” for a difficult shift, phrase shaping etc...a more commonsense instruction on the musical issues. I believe that the style of my particular brand of American Classical string playing for the most part, did in fact end up on the sheet music pages for others to read, interpret and enjoy into the future. This result is also central to why I believed that my string method based on American literature was finally both achievable and necessary for our time. It was finally time that American string playing entered the professional teaching studios, the public schools and the classrooms at conservatories.¹⁷²

No longer confined to dance bands and fiddle contests, American fiddle music may find a new home on concert hall stages and in the lesson studios of music schools

¹⁷² Mark O'Connor, email message to the author, October 2, 2016.

and conservatories. Perhaps musicians of the future will look to the turn of the twenty-first century as the start of a new era in music history with more contributions to the concerto repertoire from American composers like Mark O'Connor. I hope that with time, the piece will become more widely performed by contemporary soloists, and the work will become a beloved part of the violin repertoire.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Beth Youngblood was raised in Eastern Oregon where she took violin, fiddle, guitar, and mandolin lessons. She was a member of the Grande Ronde Symphony, the Grande Ronde Youth Symphony, and the country bands "In the Mood" and "Who's Driving?" Youngblood earned her Bachelor of Arts in Music degree at St. Olaf College as a student of Charles Gray, and studied with Danwen Jiang at Arizona State University for both her Master of Music degree in Violin Performance and Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Violin Performances. Youngblood is an active performer throughout the Phoenix metro area, is concertmaster of the Symphony of the Southwest, and is assistant concertmaster of the West Valley Symphony. Youngblood maintains a private teaching studio of violin and fiddle students.

Youngblood first became interested in the topic of this document during her high school years, when she competed annually at the National Oldtime Fiddle Contest in Wieser, Idaho, while simultaneously studying standard works from the classical violin repertoire. Just as O'Connor hoped his *Fiddle Concerto* would bring American fiddling style into the mainstream classical repertoire, Youngblood hopes this project will help to inspire more study of American fiddle music in the contemporary university setting.